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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8036
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 5821
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 2728
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1108
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1274
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4534
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2016
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: DON'T WANT IT, DON'T NEED IT: GSE ASKS THREE MORE
NGOS TO LEAVE

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In letters dated March 20, the Government of Eritrea(GSE) informed three NGOs, Concern, Accord and Mercy Corps, that they had not met the requirements for their operational permits and that their registration certificates were being revoked. According to the letter they were asked to cease operations in accordance with the NGO proclamation issued in 2005. Caught off guard and totally by surprise, the NGOs are scrambling to respond but the GSE so far has offered no further explanations. Notably different from past expulsions, where non-registered NGOs were asked to leave, the GSE had re-registered all three NGOs under the 2005 proclamation. The expulsion of Mercy Corps, one of the major distributors of USG food aid, raises serious concerns regarding the future of US funded humanitarian aid in Eritrea. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The three NGOs, Mercy Corps(US), Concern(Irish), Accord(UK)were all re-registered last year following the GSE's issuance of new laws governing NGOs, however none of the 13 registered NGOs received the operational permits required by the GSE. Mercy Corps and Concern received the letters, dated March 20, the afternoon of March 21. Signed by Amanuel Gherezgiher, the Director of the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare Office (Secretary to the Minister), the letter thanks them for their contribution and asks them to terminate activities as of February 28, 2006.

NO EXPLANATION WHY

13. (C) The Acting Country Director for Mercy Corps, Lemlem Tecle, called on the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare the morning of March 22 after receiving the letter the previous evening and asked for additional information. She shared with PolOff, that according to Amanuel, he prepared and signed the letter based on a memo issued by a committee tasked with evaluating NGOs with the intent of making decisions about the operational permit. When questioned

further about who serves on the committee or what the specific evaluation criteria were, he was unable(or unwilling) to share them with her. While Amanuel offered nearly no explanation, Lemlem felt he hinted that possibly Mercy Corps' past or planned activities do not match the not-yet-released 2006 GSE development strategy.

14. (C) Mercy Corps shared with PolOff their response letter to the GSE. Noting that they have submitted all required reports and requested documentation, they further state "although we were not aware or informed of such requirements, we regret being unable to fulfill them." Additionally, despite Amanuel's indications that the decision is final, the Mercy Corps headquarters has asked them to do all they can to prevent Mercy Corps' departure from Eritrea. Mercy Corps staff shared with PolOff that the director is trying to meet with the Eritrean Ambassador to the United States to discuss this issue. Concern Director Janardhan Rao told USAID FSN he was shocked and surprised to receive the letter and that his efforts to get an explanation were fruitless. Rao traveled immediately to the areas where they do projects to meet with local officials there. USAID FSN went on to add in his attempts to gain insight into the decision from his contacts, he was instructed by them "not to ask."

AND WHEN ASKED, THE GSE SAYS...

15. (C) In conversations this morning with the Ambassador, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for the Americas, Ghirmai Ghebremariam said essentially that he was as puzzled as we were and had no idea of what had driven the GSE's decision. Despite repeated requests in the past

month by the US Embassy to meet, Minister Askalu of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare has been "unavailable" to meet with the Ambassador or other COM. Mercy Corps reported that to the best of their knowledge none of the NGOs had met personally with the Minister since last July. (NOTE: Catholic Relief Services had phone conversations with the Minister prior to the restarting of the limited food distributions in late 2005/early 2006.End Note.)

AND THE NGOS SAY...

16. (C) As of the morning of March 23, no other NGOs had received similar letters from the GSE. The Country Director of Oxfam shared with PolOff, that at an informal meeting of the NGOs this morning, some discussion arose about the NGOs attempting together to meet with Minister to seek clarification of requirements and to press for expedited delivery of any other similar letters. The Country Director for Catholic Relief Services, expressed NGO beliefs that immigration held a list of "good" and "bad" NGOs and that some previous difficulties with Immigration may be related to this decision. In addition, among the NGOs speculation abounds, as Concern, Mercy Corps and Accord's registration numbers were one, two and four respectively, fueling discussion that the Ministry will progress in order of registration.

COMMENT

17. (C) Comment: The GSE's action in regard to the three NGOs is on a par with its decision to order the termination of USAID activities in in July of 2005: inexplicable and - at least from our perspective - not in the interests of Eritrea. Mercy Corps is one of two USG-funded NGOs that had - at least until the GSE's suspension of general food distributions almost eight months ago - been a key actor in distribution of USG food aid. This action, coupled with the GSE's continued feet dragging and seemingly obdurate attitude when it comes to addressing future food aid programs in Eritrea, will make it even hard for us to provide the humanitarian assistance we have repeatedly

offered to the GSE. The government, through its actions and attitudes, sends the signal that it does not care. It is the people of Eritrea, however, who will unfortunately be the ones to suffer. End Comment.

DeLisi